

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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USIA-06 OMB-01 OES-03 FEA-01 EB-07 TRSE-00 XMB-02

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P R 241030Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4201

INFO AMEMBASSY DACCA

AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD

AMEMBASSY KABUL

AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMCONSUL BOMBAY

AMCONSUL CALCUTTA

AMCONSUL MADRAS

C O N F I D E N T I A L NEW DELHI 2750

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, IN

SUBJECT: MRS. GANDHI'S OPPOSITION

1. FOLLOWING IS A SUMMARY OF NEW DELHI A-43, "AN ASSESSMENT OF MRS. GANDHI'S OPPOSITION," POUCHED TO THE DEPARTMENT AND INFO ADDRESSEES ON FEB. 20.

2. THE MARKED IMBALANCE IN STRENGTH BETWEEN MRS. GANDHI AND HER DISPARATE OPPOSITION IS SUBSTANTIAL. NOW AND FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE, SHE NEED NOT BE CONCERNED ABOUT A CREDIBLE THREAT TO HER POSITION AND AUTHORITY FROM THE ESTABLISHED POLITICAL OPPOSITION, THE CONGRESS PARTY OR THE JUDICIARY. HER ACTIONS INDICATE THAT SHE INTENDS TO RETAIN THE FORMIDABLE EXECUTIVE POWERS SHE HAS ACQUIRED BY DECLARING AN EMERGENCY. THE PRESS NOW REFLECTS HER VIEWS. OPPOSITION LEADERS REMAIN IN JAIL. GOVERNMENT INVES-

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TIGATIVE ARMS (INCOME TAX, CUSTOMS, ETC). CAN BE USED TO INTI-

MIDATE OPPONENTS. HER PATRONAGE RESOURCES ARE NOW ENORMOUS. PERSONS LOYAL TO THE PRIME MINISTER FILL THE TOP POSITIONS IN THE COUNTRY'S PARAMILITARY AND INTELLIGENCE ESTABLISHMENTS. A FELLOW KASHMIRI BRAHMIN HEADS INDIA'S APOLITICAL ARMY. GOI DEFENSE MINISTER BANSI LAL HAS ON TWO OCCASIONS PUBLICLY PROCLAIMED THAT HE IS LOYAL TO MRS. GANDHI PERSONALLY AND NOT TO THE OFFICE OF PRIME MINISTER. CULTURAL FACTORS, SUCH AS THE PASSIVITY AND APARTHY OF THE POPULATION, BRED OF WIDESPREAD POVERTY AND HINDU FATALISM, FURTHER REINFORCE MRS. GANDHI'S POSITION VIS-A-VIS THE OPPOSITION. SO DO INDIA'S GEOGRAPHIC AND LINGUISTIC COMPARTMENTALIZATION, AND SOCIETAL STRATIFICATION, WHICH INHIBIT OPPOSITION EFFORTS TO MOBILIZE TRANS-REGIONAL MOVEMENTS.

3. THERE CAN BE LITTLE DOUBT THAT MRS. GANDHI'S EMERGENCY ACTIONS WILL ACT AS AN IMPETUS TO OPPOSITION UNITY SHOULD POLITICAL PRISONERS BE RELEASED AND ELECTIONEERING RESUMED. BUT THE PERSONALITY, IDEOLOGICAL AND REGIONAL INTERESTS THAT HAVE ALWAYS FRUSTRATED OPPOSITION UNITY SHOULD NOT BE UNDERESTIMATED. THE HINDU-ORIENTED JANA SANGH WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY INSIST ON MAINTAINING ITS SEPARATE IDENTITY. MANY STATE-LEVEL CONGRESS-OR LEADERS WOULD WELCOME AN OPPORTUNITY TO REJOIN CONGRESS-R (AS IN TAMIL NADU) RATHER THAN "TAKE A CHANCE" WITH THE OPPOSITION. THE SOCIALIST PARTY HAS FOUND ITS STRENGTH IN THE LABOR MOVEMENT REDUCED SINCE THE EMERGENCY. THE CPM IS WRRESTLING WITH THE MOST SERIOUS CHALLENGE TO ITS UNITY SINCE THE PARTY WAS FOUNDED.

4. WITHIN THE CONGRESS PARTY, MRS. GANDHI'S SWAY IS MORE COMPLETE THAN EVER. RAM IS DESCREDITED--AN AGING. CHAVAN'S POLITICAL BASE IN MAHARASHTRA HAS BEEN REDUCED. MRS. GANDHI DROPPED SWARAN SINGH FROM THE CABINET IN DECEMBER. THE FORCED RESIGNATION OF UP CHIEF MINISTER H.N. BAHUGUNA LAST NOVEMBER ELIMINATED THE LAST REGIONAL LEADER CAPABLE OF LOOKING TO AN INDEPENDENT POLITICAL BASE TO REMAIN IN OFFICE.

5. "LEGAL RESISTANCE" THROUGH THE COURTS CONTINUES, PARTICULARLY IN LARGE, COSMOPOLITAN BOMBAY AND CALCUTTA, WHERE SIZEABLE WESTERN-ORIENTED ELITES RESIDE. BUT EVEN THE MORE OPTIMISTIC AMONG THE BAND OF LAWYERS AND EDITORS TAKING THE GOVERNMENT TO COURT ADMIT THAT THE LONG TERM BATTLE IS ALREADY LOST. MRS. GANDHI WILL USE THE APPOINTMENT OF JUDGES, CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENTS

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AND IF NECESSARY WHOLESAL CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGES TO NEUTRALIZE THE JUDICIARY.

6. THE BLEAK OUTLOOK FOR PEACEFUL RESISTANCE TO THE PRIME MINISTER MAY ENCOURAGE THOSE WITHIN THE OPPOSITION FAVORING MORE VIOLENT CONFRONTATION. THEY ARGUE THAT THE ECONOMY IS BOUND TO TAKE A TURN FOR THE WORSE AFTER THE NEXT BAD MONSOON, THUS WEAKENING HER POSITION. THIS COULD BE EXACERBATED BY ACTS OF

SABOTAGE AGAINST RAILWAY LINES AND ECONOMIC INSTALLATIONS. POPULAR DISCONTENT AMONG THE POLITICALLY AWARE WOULD GROW OVER THE GOVERNMENT'S FAILURE TO PROVIDE ECONOMIC REWARDS FOR THE LOSS OF POLITICAL FREEDOMS; THERE MIGHT BE LABOR UNREST IN AREAS LIKE THE BOMBAY-THANA INDUSTRIAL BELT WHERE 10 MILLION RESIDE, OR IN VOLATILE EASTERN INDIA. THE BUREAUCRACY AND SECURITY FORCES MIGHT BECOME PROGRESSIVELY DEMORALIZED AND VULNERABLE TO INFILTRATION. THE THREAT OF ASSASSINATION OF MRS. GANDHI OR HER SON, SANJAY, MIGHT INCREASE.

7. PROSPECTS: TO DATE, THE LEVEL OF VIOLENT RESISTANCE HAS BEEN INSIGNIFICANT, AND IT IS LIKELY TO REMAIN SO FOR THE IMMEDIATE FUTURE. IN A ONE TO TWO YEAR TIME SPAN, HOWEVER, IT COULD POSE PROBLEMS FOR MRS. GANDHI, PARTICULARLY IN THE SEPARATIST-MINDED "PERIPHERAL" STATES OF TAMIL NADU AND KASHMIR, AND POSSIBLY WEST BENGAL AND GUJARAT AS WELL. THIS CONSTITUTES A LINGERING PRESSURE ON THE PRIME MINISTER TO MOVE EVENTUALLY TOWARD RECONCILIATION. HER RECENT ANNOUNCEMENT ON KEEPING THE CON-SITUATION AND A PUBLIC STATEMENT THAT SHE WILL MEET WITH VINOBA BHAVE ON FEBRUARY 24 INDICATED THAT SHE IS STILL INTENT ON KEEPING THE DOOR OPEN TO A POSSIBLE DIALOGUE WITH THE OPPOSITION. THIS MAY IN THE END SIMPLY TAKE THE FORM OF AN EXCHANGE OF "GESTURES" (I.E. PRISONER RELEASES, ANNOUNCEMENTS BY THE OPPOSITION THAT THEY WILL REFRAIN FROM VIOLENCE). IF A SERIOUS DIALOGUE SHOULD GET OFF THE GROUND, MRS. GANDHI WILL BE BARGAINING FROM A POSITION OF OVERWHELMING STRENGTH.

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